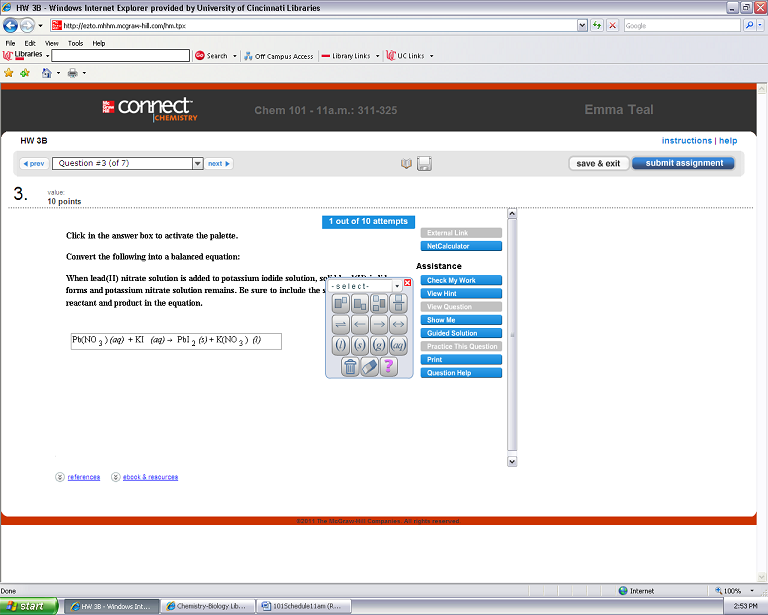
**Design Workout 2 – Participatory Design**

I spoke with users of the two primary learning management systems, Blackboard and Angel. My thoughts were to compare user satisfaction levels with the two systems and to query students about what they would change to improve their experiences.

My first user is a sophomore at the University of Cincinnati. When I asked her about Blackboard she was quick to volunteer her thoughts. She is continually aggravated with the Blackboard interface with McGraw Hill’s Connect application. Chief among her complaints is the interface for the McGraw Hill Connect Chemistry that works in conjunction with her textbook.

This user feels that the Connect Chemistry application is too exacting in its requirements for submitting homework answers. She states that having all the spacing and parentheses in exactly the right place causes a student to have to repeatedly resubmit an answer only to have the system reject it as incorrect. Even though the system allows ten attempts before the answer is scored as wrong she is stressed when she gets to seven attempts and is rejected for formatting issues, not an incorrect formula. She states in frustration; “the system is designed for a computer, not a person.”



Example of McGraw-Hill Connect Chemistry Homework Submission

This student is a Chemistry major and has a good grasp of this subject area, yet is frustrated by the tools that she is required to use to complete her homework. She is frustrated by the precise way the Connect Chemistry online courseware handles answers, with too strict formatting. She feels the system sees answers too rigidly and machine-like when there may be subtle nuances in structuring the answer, with several versions being accepted as correct.

This student would rework the system to make it more forgiving and to recognize when an answer is essentially correct, instead of the “all or nothing” approach it currently uses. She would like to see the system recognize the variances in how a human might answer the questions correctly, even though the formatting might not be exact.

This student also finds it troublesome that the practice exercises in the Physics section of McGraw Hill’s Connect are exactly the same as those in the homework section with the exception of the number values used in the problem. She feels this does a disservice to the student and feels this approach does not contribute to new knowledge.

Changes she would make in this area involve varying the practice questions in order to stimulate the student and make them think, rather than just mirror the homework questions.

* Frustration with the rigidity of the online homework scoring
* Humanize the McGraw Hill Connect Chemistry scoring
* Redundant questions don’t stimulate the student in the Physics module
* Challenge the students more by varying the practice questions from the homework questions

My second user is a freshman at Sinclair Community College in Dayton, Ohio. This user had multiple complaints as well. He expresses his frustration at the different systems in play in this environment and their apparent inability to communicate with one another.

He reports that email systems cause confusion and outages for both students and faculty. This student cited an example where he emailed his instructor from within the Angel course that he may be absent from class due to illness. He was able to get to class, albeit late, and spoke with his instructor. He found that the instructor had not seen his email because it was sent from within the Angel and did not appear in the instructor’s main email account.

Some redundancy or mirroring between the systems would have prevented this confusion. This student would like to see the two systems more integrated. Providing for course emails to appear in both the course email and the users’ primary email account would solve the problem. Mail coming into the main account from an Angel course could have a subject prefix designating the course where the email originated from.

This student had similar issues with the SCC Tartan card, used for loading money to pay fees at the college. Two different systems are used to manage these funds. The student states that he has to use both systems to manage the funds and is frustrated by the time it wastes. He feels the systems should be integrated so that only one system is necessary or at the very least they would both reflect the same information.

* Email confusion/outages caused by two systems – primary email and Angel course email
* Create a mirrored or redundant system that merges the two email systems
* SCC Tartan card requires too many steps and systems to manage account balance
* Integrate these systems so they share information with one another, minimizing the users’ time investment